BREAKING OUT

N.C. ski resorts open for business

Most have natural and man-made snow on slopes

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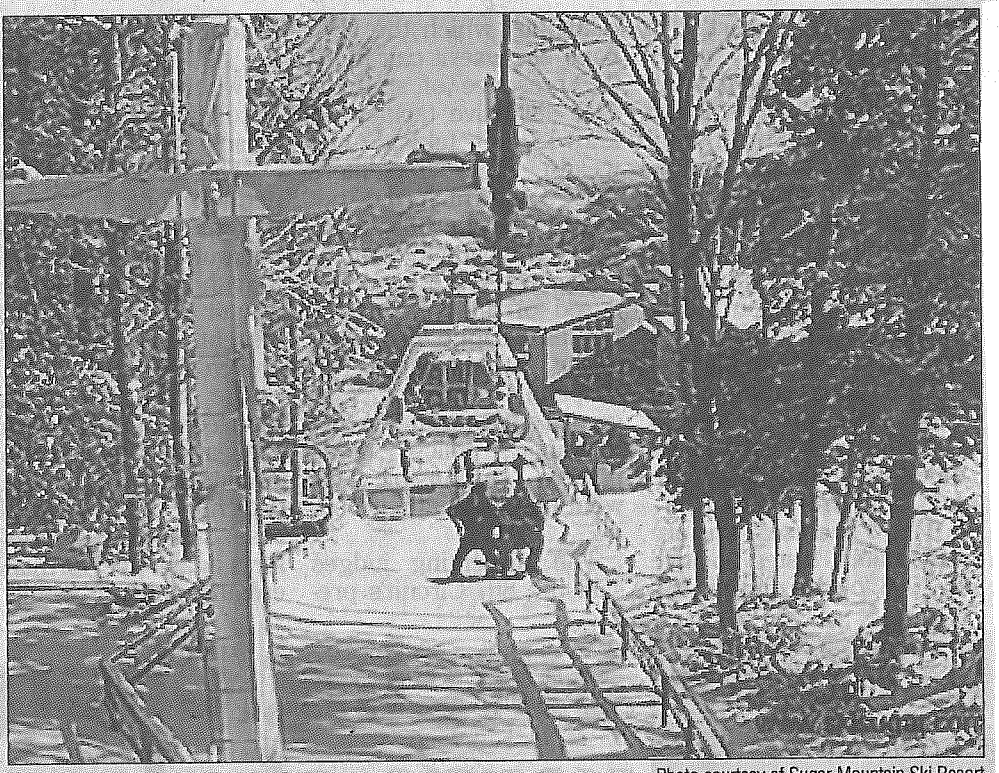


Photo courtesy of Sugar Mountain Ski Resort

Sugar Mountain Ski Resort in North Carolina is among the resorts open for the 2009-10 skiing season.

While no one can say for sure if North Carolina ski resorts can stay open every day through the season, right now most are open for business.

In the last few weeks, most resorts have either benefitted from natural snow or temperatures low enough to make their own.

Appalachian Ski Mountain, Cataloochee Ski Area and Sugar Mountain Resort all opened Nov. 27, and Beech Mountain Resort had its first skiiers Dec. 5. Wolf Ridge opened Dec. 11.

While not all runs or lifts are open – warm weather or even rain can plague even the best-laid plans for snow bunnies and snow bums heading north – generally if you want to make the trip north, you can find snow.

Skiing, snowboarding and tubing are the main draws, but in recent years, the N.C. ski resorts have diversified offering other winter sports such as ice skating, snow shoeing, and even winter hiking.

For example, Beech Mountain offers a winter hike every month from December-March. Info: www.HikeBeechMountain.com and Sugar Mountain Resort opened its 10,000-square-foot outdoor ice skating rink Thanksgiving Day.

Here is a list of the eight North Carolina ski and tubing areas:

■ Appalachian Ski Mountain – This Blowing Rock resort has 27 acres of ski terrain and it is open day and night. Info: www.appskimtn.com

■ Beech Mountain Resort – The Beech Mountain resort has 95 skiable acres and the highest elevation of any resort on the East Coast at 5,506 feet. Visit: www.skibeech.com

■ Cataloochee Ski Area – This Maggie Valley resort offers 50 skiable acres and day and evening hours. Visit: www.cataloochee.com

■ Hawksnest Resort – This snow-tubing-only resort is located in Seven Devils. Info: www.skihawk.com

■ Sapphire Valley – The slopes near Cashiers are set to open Friday, weather permitting. Visit: www.Ski-Sapphire.com

■ Scaly Mountain Outdoor Center – This four-season resort offers snow tubing when Mother Nature cooperates, and it has an artificial surface when there is no snow. Info: www.scalymountain.com

■ Sugar Mountain Resort – The resort in Sugar Mountain, has 115 skiable acres for all levels of skiing and snowboarding. Info: www.skisugar.com

■ Wolf Ridge Ski Resort – The Mars Hill ski resort has 82 acres of ski terrain, and it's open for day and night skiing. Visit: www.skiwolfridgenc.com

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FIND THE SNOW

Here are a few more snow sources for resorts in North Carolina and beyond:

■ North Carolina High Country Host, a tourism group covering five counties, runs a web site for Appalachian Ski Mountain, Beech Mountain Resort and Sugar Mountain Resort, as well as info on snow tubing at Hawksnest Resort. Visit: www.SkiTheHighCountry.com

■ To find information, snow reports and more from the 16 resorts located in North Carolina, West Virginia, Tennessee, Virginia and Maryland, visit: www.Ski-Southeast.com

NATURE PICKS